Familiarizing new employees with your company and with their role through on-the-job orientations quickly creates a feeling in them that they are part of the group, says Sarah Bell, a consultant with The Daniel Group.

“It makes them feel more at home and more at ease with what they’re doing,” says Bell.

Conversely, by not providing an orientation, you’re putting into place without much of an idea about the politics, culture, policies or procedures of your company.

“As a result, they’re going in based on the little bit of information gained from the interview or on research they have conducted on the company ahead of time, which makes the transition into their new role more difficult,” says Bell.

This can also cause problems with employee retention and could potentially lead to litigation against the company down the road if employees are not made aware of certain safety procedures up front.

*Smart Business* spoke with Bell about the importance of orienting new hires with programs that provide them with all the information they’ll need to hit the ground running.

**What should employers address with new employees during orientation?**

When introducing new hires to the business, be sure to cover the history of the company, its work environment and its culture, as well as company policies. In manufacturing, for example, it’s especially important to address any safety considerations that employees need to keep in mind as part of their jobs.

Try to be as thorough as possible. Make sure to clearly describe the type of work the employee will be doing, as well as the working conditions they will face. For example, it’s important to discuss the temperature of the working environment, the type of clothing that is appropriate for the work floor, the number of employees that person will be working with and the new hire’s interaction to others so that they can understand where they fit in to the organization.

In the manufacturing world, it’s important to walk new employees through the facility. By giving them a walkthrough, they can see the entire plant and can better understand where they’re going to be and where they might expect to go as they progress within the company.

Also cover the details of their benefits plans, such as how many days of sick leave are available and whether the dental plan covers family illnesses, and go over as much of the employee handbook as possible so that they hear it from you, in addition to having a copy of it to refer to.

PowerPoint presentations and safety videos can also be helpful, and it’s important to have employees sign off on each policy to ensure that they understand it and that they have a record indicating that they’ve been through it. Part of the purpose of orientation is to not only make sure that employees have the right skills but also to help them adapt.

Getting more in-depth into your company’s policies prepares employees better for the job, lessens the possibility of overwhelming them and ultimately improves retention. A thorough orientation can also alert employees early that the company may not be a good fit for them if they were not entirely aware of all the working conditions in the interview.

**What are the benefits of having a strong orientation program?**

Starting employees off with a strong safety orientation program can save a company money in the long run. By presenting employees with all of the policies and procedures, you’re covering yourself if there are issues later.

If employees violate policies, you then have grounds to terminate them and deny their unemployment claims, especially in right-to-work states. This is again a good reason to have employees sign off on each policy so that it’s clear they were presented with the information, which can also serve as protection against possible lawsuits.

**How much should companies expect to pay for an orientation program?**

It depends. You can conduct a solid orientation within two hours and with little expense. The only expenses are the creation of safety training videos, printed materials and the employees’ wages for the time they’re in orientation, which could be as few as one hour to as many as six.

Most insurance companies can provide safety training videos in a number of different categories and job functions as part of your existing coverage. Contact your insurance provider to see what it has available.

**Who at the company should conduct the orientation program?**

Human resources department personnel should conduct orientations. However, if a company doesn’t have such a department, it should be whoever controls the hiring, such as the person responsible for processing the benefits.

Those people are very familiar with the benefits because they go over them often and they are typically involved in implementing company policies. Those are also the people who usually handle confidential documents.

**What if a company doesn’t have a human resources department?**

If you don’t have a human resources department, consider bringing in a consultant. Look for someone with strong experience in the field who can come in and assess your human resource policies and possibly implement an orientation program.

There are many consulting firms that could perform a human resource audit, as well, which will assure that a company has policies and procedures in place for I9s and E-Verify and to ensure that you’re in compliance in a number of different areas. The firm can review your employee handbook, examine existing policies, advise you on what you might be missing and help devise new programs you can implement moving forward.

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